

GEAR UP American Samoa Biennial Report Narrative

Overview of GEAR UP American Samoa (GUAS)

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a United States Department of Education grant that provides opportunities and services to students so that they are prepared to succeed in post secondary education. GEAR UP American Samoa (GUAS) provides services to a cohort of approximately 850 students from the 7th grade to their high school graduation. GUAS was awarded in 2006, and began in 13 private and public elementary schools in 2006. Currently, GUAS has 11 community partners and 4 major partners (in addition to the partner schools). The major partners during the first two years included: American Samoa Department of Education (AS DOE), American Samoa Department of Human and Social Services (AS DHSS), American Samoa Department of Health (AS DOH), American Samoa National Olympic Committee (ASNOC).

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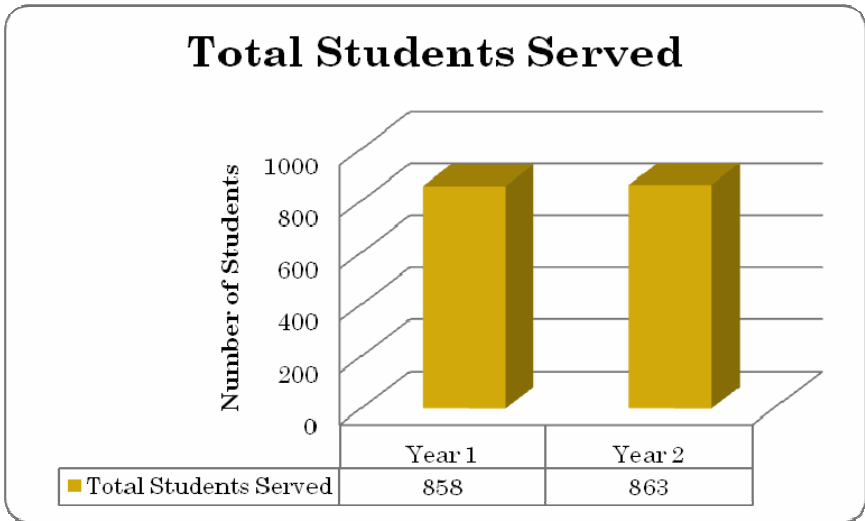


What does GUAS do?

GUAS provides services that target the conditions and skills that assist students in succeeding post-secondary education. It also aims to increase the expectations of students, that is, as a result of their participation in GEAR UP they aspire to enroll in post-secondary education. These services include tutoring and mentoring students, technology support, teacher training and instructional support, and information concerning college preparation. GUAS works with schools and community partners to provide coordinated services to students, families, and teachers. GUAS also coordinates educational family events. For example, over 600 students and parents attended the American Samoa Community College (ASCC) performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* during year two Fall Semester and over 500 students and parents attended the performance of *Aida* during year two Spring Semester.



Total Students Served

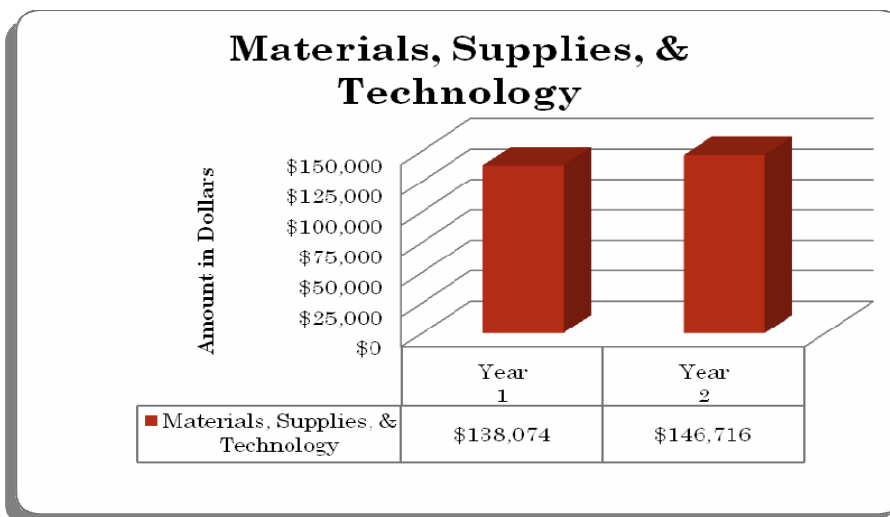


How does GUAS work?

All the services GUAS provides have the same goal: increasing students' opportunities to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. The services provided by GUAS aim to increase academic skills and provide other necessary information about college. GUAS in conjunction with cohort school tutors have provided 110 (in Year One) and 410 (in Year Two) average hours per student in after-school tutoring sessions. In the last two years, GUAS has offered professional development and training for all cohort teachers. In Year Two, teachers who participated received 47.9 hours per month of training and professional development. These trainings and developments are intended not only to help teachers administer the program, but to build their skill set and abilities for use with the GUAS cohort and future students. During the first two years GUAS has provided \$284,790 in technology supplies including laptops, printers, learning software, user licenses, pocket dictionaries, calculators, white boards and other needed instructional classroom supplies in addition to include Tutor stipend. These technology supplies introduced students to new learning techniques and helped to build their technology related skills, an essential component for college success.



Wrap-Around-Services (WAS) are provided to families and students. These services are presentations to families by GUAS community partners on topics related to college preparedness, social teen issues, teen health issues, career issues, physical fitness, etc. In the last two years of the project GUAS has provided a total of 90 WAS sessions to 4,465 attendees.



Lessons learned from two years of GUAS:

The GEAR UP program in American Samoa has made continuous progress toward its goal of preparing students for post-secondary education. By year two GUAS identified a number of key findings that both reflect the accomplishments, but also to highlight areas where changes and modifications can help increase program effectiveness.

Year 2 Findings

- **GUAS is viewed by cohort teachers and school administrators as having a positive impact in their schools.** This finding is supported by school personnel's reported perceptions of academic improvement among students, stronger connection between teachers and students, and increased individual teacher capacity.



***Recommendation:** Year three evaluation efforts will expand this valuable method of data gathering to conduct interviews and observations, and also begin conducting focus groups with GUAS youth, parents and partners.*

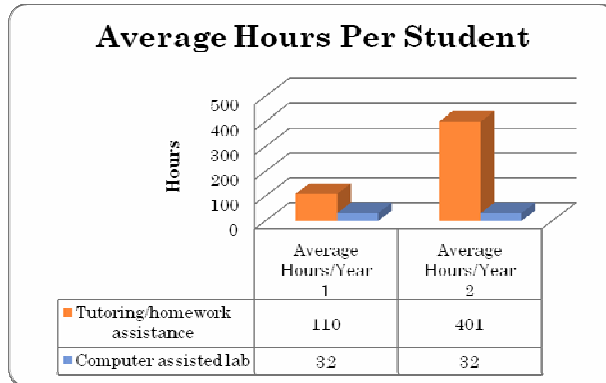
- **GUAS students are achieving academically, performing above average in English and Math. However, key areas of academic improvement cannot be documented at this time due to limited available academic data for this Year.** This finding is evidenced by: 1) grade maintenance among the cohort of a B or better in both subjects; and 2) grade improvement of students as reported by some teachers; and 3) limited comparative analysis capability with only one year of SAT10 data is available at present.



***Recommendation:** Year three activities will focus on providing hands-on training and monitoring of teachers in utilizing the Markbook to enter student grades. GUAS Coordinators should routinely check teacher progress in mastering this software and collaborate with the GUAS Data Specialist and Program Director to ensure data is entered correctly and can be retrieved for analysis.*

- Tutoring and academic assistance efforts are being consistently provided for GUAS students.**

This finding is evidenced by: 1) 70% of the cohort students attending after-school sessions, with 401 as the average number of tutoring hours provided to students this year; 2) the 31 Individual Education Plans (IEP) developed for 31 at-risk¹ students who are in GUAS; 3) the 173 students identified by teachers as having a high aptitude for mathematics and who attended math camp where they received one week of intensive mathematics instruction; and 4) the 441 GUAS Certificate of Accomplishments awarded to students who had an attendance rate of 80% or higher at the after school session .



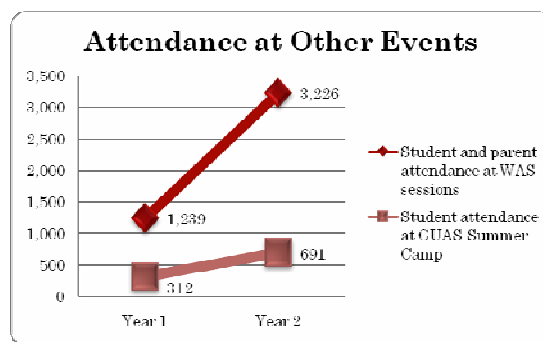
Recommendation: Year three efforts will focus on tracking each student’s utilization of the academic assistance programming to match against their academic achievement. This will ensure that services can be better tailored to each student’s individual needs.

- GUAS Wrap Around Services (WAS) is meeting a need among students and parents and the community at large for services that support academic achievement.**

This is evidenced by the 60% increase in attendance at WAS sessions in year two, reaching 3,226 students, parents, school staff, and community members with information about health, college financing, careers, and employment, etc. Because participants in year two included not only students and parents, but also community members, GUAS has increased the awareness of GEAR UP services throughout the community.



Recommendations: Year three project attention will focus on: 1) coordinating the tracking of school referrals to counseling services through DHSS for identified GUAS students to ensure care coordination; and 2) establishing



tracking individual student attendance at each WAS as a means of evaluating the effect of this service by itself and/or in conjunction with other services on student academic performance.

- **GUAS is meeting its training goal of working with at least 50 teachers throughout the school year, although specific professional development objectives were not met in Year Two.**

This finding is evidenced by: 1) the 56 teachers who received various elements of training throughout the year; 2) the average of 47.9 per month of hours of technology, classroom, and other training to teachers who participated at each school; and 3) the 26 out of proposed 50 teachers who completed professional development training by GUAS.



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Recommendations: Year three efforts will focus on: 1) re-writing this objective to measure both GUAS training and professional development to capture the many important capacity-building training activities taking place; 2) implementing planning strategies to prepare for potential changes in AS DOE turnover that delay the training sessions at the beginning of the year; 3) structuring School Coordinators as Trainer-of-Trainers to mitigate the impact of turnover and build sustainability of the GUAS program into the schools; and 4) filling the vacant Math and English instructor positions on the GUAS staff will offer full-scale teacher training and support, and ultimately improve students' classroom receipt of Mathematics and English instruction.

- **There has been significant improvement in data collection and reporting by the GUAS schools. However, consistency in academic progress tracking remains an area for improvement.**

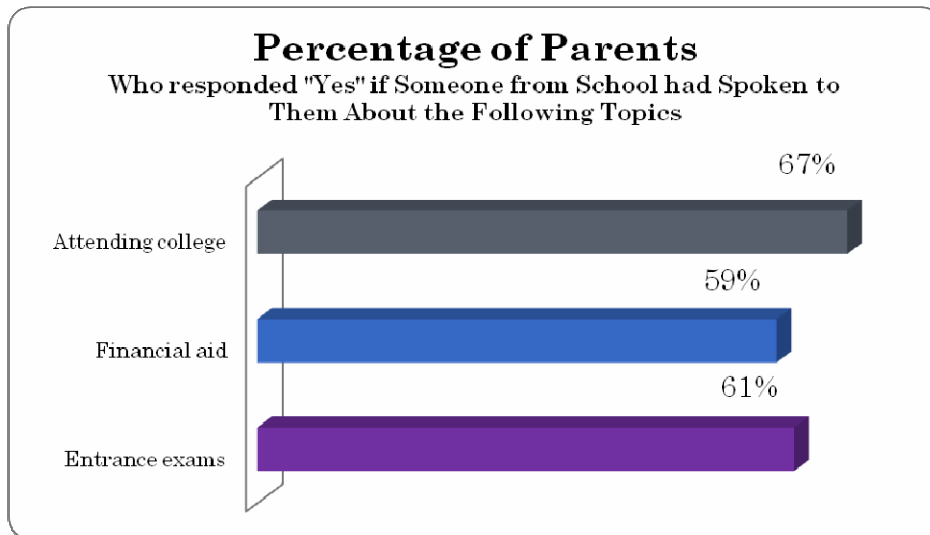
This finding is drawn from: 1) the academic data collected in Year two that was previously unavailable and is now a proxy baseline by which the project can begin measuring outcomes; and 2) the inconsistency in the reporting format and timing of the academic data that made analysis difficult.



Recommendation: Year three efforts should focus on capacity building to improving data collection efforts by GUAS teachers and staff, and on enhancing collaboration between the cohort schools, program staff, and the evaluation team in data collection efforts. This may include earlier training in Markbook for new teachers and increased monitoring of teacher data collection efforts by the Evaluator and School Coordinators.

- **College knowledge is generally high among GUAS students and parents.** This is evidenced by the 56.3% of 762 students surveyed who responded that “yes” someone from GUAS or their school had spoken to them about college entrance exams, and the 53.0% of students who responded “yes” that someone from their school or GUAS had spoken to them about the availability of financial aid to pay for college.

Recommendations: Year three efforts will include: 1) administering the College Knowledge survey right at the beginning of the school year before students have received any college information; 2) amending the survey to ask additional questions about college that would be more relevant to American Samoa (off-island versus on-island, etc.); and 3) hosting a special “College Night” event focused specifically on college information for students and parents.



- **Financial knowledge is increasing among GUAS families,** as evidenced by: 1) AS Bank of New Zealand officials reported that approximately 400 new student/family bank accounts were opened during year one and 200 bank accounts was opened in year two through the Bank of New Zealand as part of a partnership with GUAS WAS; 2) BlueSky officials reported that approximately 50 parents have begun the process of purchasing a computer through a low cost program instituted through this GUAS WAS partnership; and 3) the 59% of parents that responded “yes” that someone from their child’s school or GUAS had spoken to them about the availability of financial aid to pay for college.



Recommendation: Year three efforts will include: 1) amending the survey to ask additional financial questions related to understanding college costs and where to get financial aid information; and 2) hosting a special “College Night” event with specific workshops focused on financial planning and preparation for college.

- **GUAS extra-curricular activities has added value to the program curriculum.** This finding is evidenced by: 1) the overwhelming attendance (600 and then 500) to the ASCC Art’s performance; 2) the 518 students who attended the week-long physical fitness camp hosted by GUAS over the summer; 3) the Feleti Barstow Public Library report that from February to May 2008, 125 GUAS students signed up for a library card; and 4) the 235 students who completed the required GUAS Reading Project to receive two tickets each to the ASCC performance of Aida.



Recommendation: Year three should continue these activities with additional integration of academic concepts such as ASCC campus tours to Land Grant, the ASCC Library, Institute of Trades and Technology, participation to the college month events as well as continued participation with the ASCC Music and Arts Performances each semester.

- **GUAS is building a sustainable program model.** This finding is evidenced by several documented year two achievements: 1) the project’s ability to maintain a 100% participation level from Year 1 to Year 2 from the 13 cohort schools and 16 community partners despite a traditional lack of integration and cooperation among various service sectors in American Samoa; and 2) \$284,790 was invested by GUAS in technology related school supplies, including, laptop computers, software supplies and Tutor stipends. The strong positive effect of these efforts as reported by GUAS schools on the teachers, classrooms and students extends beyond the GUAS program and will be felt by future classes.

Recommendation: GUAS staff and project partners should map out a formal sustainability plan to continue the project after federal funding, encompassing many of the areas of achievement noted above.